

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Community and Faith-Based Organizing and Development Resources

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G-D REMEMBERED CHANNAH

PARTS:

Voice of G-d:

Narrator:

Elkanah:

Peninah:

Eli:

Channah:

Narrator: There once was a man named Elkanah. He lived in the hill-country of Mount Ephraim in the city of Ramathaim-Tzophim. Elkanah was one man in a thousand. As our rabbis say, through him, his entire generation was lifted up. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Elkanah had a wife named Channah, whom he dearly loved. So much did he love her that one might say she was graced, for that is what the name Channah means—except for one thing: After ten years of marriage they still had no children. And at that point Channah said to her husband:

Channah: You must go and marry another woman! That way, at least *you* can have children. And perhaps when G-d sees my pain, perhaps I too will be given a child.

Narrator: And so he did. The second wife's name was Peninah, meaning pearl. Some might say it wasn't such a good name for her either, given what happened. In any case, she and Elkanah did come to have children. In fact they had ten of them. Channah, however, remained barren and broken-hearted. Even so, she would go up four times a year to worship in Shiloh with Elkanah and Peninah, their sons and daughters, Elkanah's brothers and sisters, and all the rest of his relatives. It was a pilgrimage. And everywhere they went people would ask:

Congregation: Where are you going?

Narrator: And Elkanah and his family would reply:

*Elkanah,
Channah &
Peninah:*

We're going up to the house of G-d in Shiloh, where Torah is taught. Why don't you come too? We can all go up together.

Narrator: And so they did. Every year they took a different route, so they could reach as many people as possible. And every year it got bigger and bigger. The first year five families went up; the year after that ten. In time, entire villages from all over the land of Israel journeyed with them. Elkanah and his family kept bringing up more and more Israelites with them until finally, *everyone* began to go up. It was at that point that G-d spoke to Elkanah:

Voice of G-d: Elkanah! You have done well. You have taught the people to do good—so much good that you have tipped the balance-scales of the world. Therefore, I will give you a son who will also tip the balance of the world for the good.

Narrator: But the question was, who was going to be the mother of the child? As we said earlier, Channah did not have children. And Peninah, Elkanah's second wife was . . . well . . . let's just say this: As soon as Peninah had children, she began to treat Channah cruelly—all day long she mocked her. In the evening she would say things like:

Peninah: [EXAMINING HER FINGERNAILS] Oh . . . by the way, Channah, did you remember to get a scarf for your older son and an undershirt for your second son?

Channah: What? What are you talking about?

Peninah: Oh! I forgot! You don't have a son, do you?

Narrator: And early in the morning she would say things like:

Peninah: You're not up yet? You'd better get up and wash your children's faces, or they'll be late for school.

Narrator: And at noon she would say:

Peninah: Channah! It's about time for your children to come home, isn't it?

Narrator: It never ended. When they sat down to eat and Elkanah would give each of his children a portion, Peninah would say to him:

Peninah: Elkanah! This son of mine has not eaten yet; this daughter of mine is still hungry; this son of mine is waiting for his portion.

Narrator: And pointing to Channah's stomach she would say to Elkanah:

Peninah: Oh! I forgot: you haven't given any to the unborn one.

Narrator: Let's face it: Peninah did everything she could to make Channah miserable. And she succeeded. But why did she do it? Was she jealous? Perhaps. Or perhaps, as our rabbis say, she did it for Channah's sake. She

wanted to make Channah thunder against G-d for not giving her children. In any case, it happened time after time, year after year when they went up to Shiloh. In fact, Peninah provoked her so much that Channah cried all the time and would not eat. So, when Elkanah gave portions to Peninah, and to all her sons and daughters, he gave a double portion to Channah, saying:

Elkanah: Here, Channah. Please eat! I'm worried about you!

Peninah: Why should she have twice as much as me? She won't eat it anyway.

Channah: She's right. I can't. Take it away!

Elkanah: Channah, why do you carry on like this? You have to eat. Am I not more important to you than ten sons? You can't go on like this!

Narrator: But she did go on. And she didn't hesitate to speak up to G-d, either. After all the eating and drinking at Shiloh, she got up and went to the Temple. There, sitting on the seat by the doorpost was Eli the priest. He kept an eye on her as she poured out her heart.

Channah: [LOOKING UP AND RAISING BOTH HANDS] Master of the Universe! You who have created everything in this world for a reason! You have given me eyes to see, ears to hear, a mouth to speak. Why have you given me a womb, if not to carry a child? Is it so hard for You who created the sun, the moon, and all the stars, to give me just one child? Look at the all the people . . . [MAKING SWEEPING GESTURE TO INDICATE ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE CONGREGATION AND LOOKING BACK UP] . . . I have gathered to stand before You. Shall I not have even one to call my own? Do you not see how I suffer! Remember me! I am your servant! If you will give me a son, then I will bring him up for You! Not a son above the people, but with the people! I will give him to You for all the days of his life!

Narrator: And when Channah finished hurling her words at G-d, then G-d spoke to Peninah, saying:

Voice of G-d: You see! You wanted Channah to thunder against Me. Just remember, thunder is followed by rain.

Peninah: What?

Voice of G-d: You will see. I will remember her.

Narrator: All this time Eli the priest was watching Channah in wonderment, for he saw her lips move, but he couldn't hear her voice. That was because Channah was speaking in her heart, or as our rabbis say "to her heart," her voice barely above a whisper. But Eli knew none of this. He only thought he knew what was going on. So he said to Channah:

Eli: You're drunk! Don't come in here with your wine.

Narrator: But Channah answered:

Channah: I'm not drunk! And you are not my superior. They say you are a prophet, but it's obvious that you are not. The Divine Presence cannot be with you, or you would know that I'm not drunk. It's not wine or strong drink that I have poured out before G-d, but my soul. Yet you judge me harshly. Can't you see that my heart is broken?

Narrator: When Eli realized that he had judged her wrongly, he tried to make peace with her by answering her with a blessing:

Eli: Go in peace. May the G-d of Israel grant you your prayer.

Narrator: And Channah replied:

Channah: And may I also find favor with you.

Narrator: So Channah went on her way. She was no longer sad, and she ate. The very next day Elkanah and his family returned to their home in Ramah. And then G-d did remember Channah. She gave birth to a son. And when it came to giving him a name. . . .

Channah: I will call him Samuel, because it was from G-d that I asked for him.

Narrator: Then Elkanah, and his whole household, went up to worship G-d. But Channah did not want to go; and she said to her husband:

Channah: I will not go up until Samuel is weaned. Then I will fulfill my promise. Then I will bring him up, so that he may appear before G-d, and stay there forever.

Narrator: And Elkanah, said to her:

Elkanah: Forever! Well . . . do what seems right to you. And may G-d make it so.

Narrator: Now Channah was not like some people I know, who ask for something, and promise the world for it, and then, once they get the thing they ask for, forget all about their promise. Channah was not like that. Channah took care of her son until he was weaned. And then she took him up with her—along with three cows, a measure of flour, and a bottle of wine—and brought him to the house of G-d in Shiloh. Samuel was only a little child when she did this. And when she brought the child to Eli the priest, she said to him:

Channah: Remember me? I am the woman who was standing near you, praying. And this is the child that I prayed for. G-d granted my prayer. I will therefore loan him to G-d. As long as he lives I will loan him to G-d.

Narrator: And Channah exulted before G-d:

Channah: My heart **rejoices** in You, O G-d. My glory is raised up by You. For You, G-d, are the one creator, high **above** the world. But You are also **in** this world, for You made us in Your image. You gave us free will and made us responsible for our deeds and for our words. Before You, all our deeds are added up. Each one is like a brick that can form a wall, and You the Builder of the world. Every human child throughout all time is Your worker. And every good deed that we do, we deliver into Your hand. There is nothing good that is unimportant. You lift the poor from the dust, You raise the beggar from the mud, to be seated among princes. Even the smallest of us, if we do good, has a part in eternity. We have nothing to fear. You guard our feet. You keep Your eye on every step we take. . . . Oh! . . . [LOOKING TO BACK OF ROOM AS IF TO SOMETHING AT A GREAT DISTANCE] . . . my eyes are opened! I see the goal of history! I see . . . [POINTING TO THE DISTANCE] . . . in the distance there . . . King David. It is my son who will anoint him!

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